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The University of Dayton

News Release

March 9, 1994

Contact: Andy Schueneman
or Candace Stuart

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON STUDENT HELPS MOM AND AUNT EARN GRADUATE EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMAS

DAYTON, Ohio -- The usual role is for the child to be supported and nurtured by parents throughout childhood and young adulthood: payback isn't expected. This isn't the case for Lisa Johnson Shurts, a junior English major at the University of Dayton. Since enrolling at UD in the fall of 1991, she has successfully tutored her mother and aunt for their Graduate Equivalency Diplomas and now continues teaching throughout the community.

Shurts, a graduate of West Carrollton High School and a National Merit Scholarship finalist, was a first-year student when her mother began studying for her GED and needed to be tutored for the math section of the exam. Her mother, Teresa Johnson, had dropped out of high school as a sophomore.

"She would come to Marycrest (residence hall) and pick me up for lunch and we would go to Denny's and do fractions, decimals and scientific notation and stuff like that," Shurts said.

After her mother obtained her GED, her aunt decided to pursue a GED as well. She also needed the same kind of tutoring. From there Shurts was hooked on helping others.

Since then, she has worked with the Dayton Literacy Project, a program run through UD that works with Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) students. She was a Write Place tutor at the Learning Assistance Center, an English tutor for the Summer Trial Enrollment Program and a math tutor at Shawen Acres, a division of Montgomery County Children's Services which offers GED classes to teen-agers. She also recently received certification with the Miami Valley Literacy Council to become a literacy instructor.

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While working with the Dayton Literacy Project, Shurts dealt with GED students who had come within a narrow margin of passing their exams. Their situation was generally similar to that of her mother and aunt.

"My mother is pretty young," Shurts said. "She's 38, so it was easy for me to relate to the adult literacy students, because most of them are in the same situation my parents were. They got pregnant early and then they didn't really have anything. This is a common story, especially for women in ABLE and GED."

Now Shurts is beginning to focus her efforts more firmly on literacy education. She intends to write her undergraduate honors thesis on the subject of literacy education and, through the Miami Valley Literacy Council, will begin working with a 43-year-old student on a one-on-one basis.

"Working with a person individually, you get to see their improvement and see what having a higher reading and a higher writing level can do in their own lives," Shurts said.

But the main reason for Shurts' work in educating others is her commitment to share the gifts that she has with those who may be in need of her help.

"A lot of people make the mistake of thinking that just because someone didn't finish high school or dropped out of grade school that that somehow makes them less of a person than those of us attending college," Shurts said. "I am no better than anyone else, I am just a lot luckier."

"I think the attitude is that the problems that these people have were brought upon themselves, but that is not true. No one chooses not to have an education and to be poor and depend on the welfare system."

For interviews, call **Lisa Shurts** at (513) 445-5826 or (513) 291-3518. For information or photos, contact **Candace Stuart** at (513) 229-3257.